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LETTER DATED 12 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued on 12 March 1999, entitled "One Deceptive Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: Asmara Plays with Words" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement issued on 12 March 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia entitled "One Deceptive Step Forward, Two Steps Backward: Asmara Plays with Words"

During the various attempts at peacemaking since the Eritrean and occupation of Ethiopian territory, Eritrea has been consistent on only one point - that it might pull back its troops only within the context of mutual redeployment by both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

This was also the position that Eritrea wanted the Organization of African Unity (OAU) High-level Delegation to endorse, but it was rejected. Ethiopia's position has been consistent as well, and this was what was eventually endorsed by the High-level Delegation and formed the basis for the Framework Agreement - that Eritrea should withdraw from all occupied Ethiopian land in order to prepare the ground for the peaceful resolution of the crisis.

Some might have been inclined to give the benefit of the doubt to the Eritrean declaration "accepting" the OAU Framework Agreement after it had suffered defeat at Badme. That the Eritrean move was bogus, that it was simply a tactical move to buy time, and that Eritrea's sincerity could not be taken for granted was immediately obvious to Ethiopia.

This has now become crystal-clear, and that Eritrea's expressed acceptance of the OAU Framework Agreement is only a fake commitment has been made abundantly clear by the statement issued by its Foreign Ministry on 10 March 1999 (S/1999/259). By making its withdrawal from the rest of the occupied Ethiopian territory conditional on demilitarization along the common border and on mutual redeployment, Eritrea is simply confirming that its declared acceptance of the Framework Agreement is bogus and, as Ethiopia has already insisted, is tactical and designed to buy time.

That Eritrea in its latest statement is simply reiterating the same old position, considered a non-starter by OAU, requires little explanation. But it must be necessary to repeat what the Eritrean President said to the summit of the OAU Central Organ in Ouagadougou in December 1998:

> "... [A] though we believe, given a cessation of hostilities, that demarcation can be done expeditiously, we have expressed our readiness to redeploy our forces within the context of mutual demilitarization."

What the Framework Agreement demands that Eritrea do, so that peace may have a chance through negotiation, is to withdraw from all occupied Ethiopian territory. It was because Eritrea in effect rejected this that it became necessary to rout its army of occupation to liberate Badme. Eritrea is now advancing the same position - rejected by the High-level Delegation as well as earlier by United States-Rwandese facilitators - with respect to other parts of Ethiopian land still occupied by Eritrea.

It should thus be clear that the apparent step taken by Eritrea when it informed the Security Council that it had accepted the Framework Agreement is only a deceptive move. Even those who were prepared to give Eritrea the benefit of the doubt should take this as Eritrea taking two steps backwards. In reality, Eritrea has never moved an inch, and by reiterating the position that it has always advanced, it has simply made it plain how difficult it is to accept the principles upon which the OAU Framework Agreement rests. It is this same difficulty that made the battle of Badme and the routing of its army of occupation necessary.

The lack of sincerity of the Eritrean authorities appears to have no limit, even with respect to issues that are as clear as day. The restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty over the Badme region required Ethiopia to pay a price in human lives which would have been unnecessary if Eritrea had accepted the OAU peace plan. Now Eritrea wishes, in the statement by its Foreign Ministry referred to above, to imply and to shamelessly tell the world that it had redeployed from Badme in compliance with the OAU Framework Agreement.

It is therefore necessary to underline and reiterate the key elements in the statement that the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry issued on 10 March 1999 (S/1999/260) which Ethiopia considers as irreducible minimum conditions for the resolution of the crisis imposed on Ethiopia be Eritrea. They are as follows:

(a) The yardstick for Eritrea's genuine acceptance of the Framework Agreement is its immediate and unconditional withdrawal from the remaining occupied Ethiopian territory and the return of the status quo ante in full, in line with the letter and spirit of the OAU peace plan;

(b) In the light of the huge loss of lives, the humanitarian crisis and the destruction of property caused by the Eritrean aggression, Eritrea must assume full responsibility for all the damages.

We once again call upon the international community - as we have not tired of doing during this entire period of madness in Asmara - to convey the message even belatedly that aggression cannot be rewarded and violating principles of international law has its consequences.